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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: AMAZON PROTESTS: AIDSESEP'S VIEWS AND ROLE

REF: LIMA 822 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. P Michael McKinley for reasons 1.4b and d.

11. (C) Summary: Prior to the June 5 outbreak of violence, Emboffs met with representatives of Aidesep (the indigenous organization leading Amazon protests) to learn about their concerns and demands. Aidesep leader Alberto Pizango described centuries of abuses against the indigenous and the indifference of modern governments, which made protests the only means of attracting attention. Ideological and inflexible, Pizango explained the importance of land to indigenous communities, asserted, somewhat ominously, that his people were "willing to die" to defend their territory, and claimed that the GOP was not interested in resolving the conflict (a claim not borne out by the facts). In a separate meeting after the outbreak of violence, representatives of a prominent international NGO that has worked with and funded Aidesep told us the indigenous organization had lost control of the protests. The NGO representatives feared that, in the absence of clear leadership or a strong political signal (like suspending the decrees), protests could flare up again and spread chaotically from the jungle to the sierra. However legitimate the underlying grievances of the indigenous communities, it seems clear that radical political actors managed to twist the protests to disturbing ends. End Summary.

Historical Abuses

12. (C) Prior to the outbreak of violence June 5, and as protests in the Peruvian Amazon dragged into their second month, Emboffs met with the leadership of the indigenous organization Aidesep to learn first-hand about their concerns and demands. Aidesep leader Alberto Pizango described indigenous resentment as rooted in hundreds of years of exploitation and human rights abuses. In more recent history, he claimed that the Peruvian government had passed presidential decrees touching on indigenous lands without properly consulting affected communities. Last year, Aidesep led protests demanding the annulment of a decree that he said many observers agreed was potentially damaging to indigenous rights. (The decree stated that a simple majority of members in a community could vote to approve a project, rather than the two-thirds previously required.) After Congress voted to annul the law and promised to form a commission to review other decrees, Aidesep ended the protests. When that commission recommended annulling all the decrees in question, he said, Congress did nothing. (Comment: The Congressional Commission was led by a Nationalist Party representative who

was opposed to the decrees from the start. End Comment.) Congress's failure to follow through led Aidesep to conclude that only protests could gain the government's attention (refs), he said.

"Willing to Die" for Their Land

¶4. (C) Pizango described indigenous lands as the "embryo of life itself," and asserted that his people were "willing to die" to protect their territory. (Comment: Pizango's remark, which he repeated in different ways throughout the conversation, and his uncompromising, somewhat zealous demeanor, seemed ominous to us at the time. His comments reflected his public call to "insurgency" on May 15, which he said meant to "disobey and not recognize the authority of the President...and of the security forces." On May 14th, Aidesep's "Committee For Struggle" published a highly inflammatory manifesto declaring insurgency in Amazonian indigenous lands and labeling as aggression any attempt by outside forces to enter their territory. End Comment.)

¶5. (C) Underscoring the "land as life" theme, Pizango and other Aidesep representatives complained that the extraction of non-renewable resources has polluted their communities and left them with nothing good. Based on past experience, they had no reason to believe that things would be different this time around and were acutely skeptical that either the government or the private sector had any interest in protecting their lands. That was why protests were needed to bring pressure against the government, he said. If a few protesters "have to die" to protect indigenous lands, then so be it, Pizango repeated. (Comment: Given that the decrees Aidesep has challenged provide much stronger protection for indigenous lands than laws that were previously in force, it seems clear that distrust of the government, rather than the contents of the decrees themselves, lies at the heart of the protests. End Comment.)

Rejecting Dialogue

¶6. (C) Pizango claimed that dialogue with the Prime Minister's office, which led the "multi-sectoral commission," had led nowhere. He said he saw no real will on the part of the GOP to resolve the conflict and therefore saw no reason to keep talking. In a revealing turn, Pizango added that dialogue and compromise were not Aidesep's goals, but rather the complete revocation of all nine decrees in question, and repeated that indigenous communities' rights were non-negotiable. He did suggest, however, that if the decrees were annulled and a genuine process of consultation launched, new laws that incorporated Aidesep's concerns might be acceptable. (Note: The Prime Minister's office has underscored the government's demonstrated interest in dialogue and in negotiating a mutually acceptable resolution to the impasse. The official in charge of conflict resolution in the PM's office told us that Aidesep, and Pizango in particular, had repeatedly and intentionally thwarted progress on negotiations (refs). He also pointed us to the PCM website where the government's numerous efforts to reinstitute talks with Aidesep are painstakingly outlined -- we forwarded this link to Peru deskoff. End Note.)

Aidesep in Confusion After Violence, No Valid Interlocutor

¶7. (C) On June 9, Emboffs met with leaders of a prominent international NGO (protect) that has contributed funds and worked closely with Aidesep -- to hear their impressions of the crisis. Acknowledging the importance of Decree 1090 for strengthening environmental protections, the NGO reps speculated that -- despite Pizango's public calls for "insurgency" -- the Aidesep leader had not expected the protests to turn so deadly. In that sense, they feared Aidesep had lost control of the situation. The NGO representatives contrasted the current protests with those that occurred in 2008. At that time, Aidesep had launched a limited action to press the government with a specific and relatively narrow demand, successfully resisted attempts from inside and outside their organization to radicalize their

movement, and quickly called off the protests as soon as their demands were met.

¶8. (C) Now that Pizango has accepted asylum from the Nicaraguan government, the NGO reps feared that Aidesep has no valid interlocutors with the authority (delegated by the communities) to negotiate an end to current and future protests. After Pizango went into hiding, they said, Aidesep's directors scrambled to determine who would replace him. Initially, Secretary Shapion Noningo appeared to lead the organization, but he was soon replaced by Vice President Daisy Zapata. The reps said that one of the consequences of the leadership confusion was that neither Noningo nor Zapata has been willing to condemn the execution of police officers because they cannot contradict the now broadly-held opinion among indigenous leaders that their fight was in self-defense. Zapata reflected this view in a June 10 interview: "As Aidesep, we do what the "bases" (grass roots) tell us, and they are telling us to fight until the decrees are dismissed. If we do not obey them, we will lose our jobs."

Worst-Case Scenarios, and Potential Solutions

¶9. (C) The NGO reps worried that the apparent breakdown in Aidesep leadership, which was a challenge even during peaceful times, could generate a far more serious crisis with no simple resolution. Their short-term concern was that the protests could reignite and spread in an unplanned, organic way, first across the jungle, then across the sierra. The reps highlighted the recent indigenous summit in Puno where Andean groups for the first time publicly supported the Amazonian indigenous in what appeared to be a much broader political-ideological project. On the other hand, they argued that the temporary suspension of the presidential decrees might have a positive impact if coupled with dialogue with a broader cross-section of the indigenous population.

Comment: Protest Hijacked By Radicals

¶10. (C) For now, protests in Bagua seem to have subsided somewhat as the national strike in support of the indigenous protestors demands have gained little support. Roadblocks continue between the Amazonian town of Yurimaguas and the city of Tarapoto, however, and future strikes cause a new flare-up. Meanwhile, the government is seeking to reopen a broad-based dialogue along the lines of the NGO's recommendations (septel). However, despite the legitimate underlying grievances of the indigenous communities, and their historical distrust of a state that has ignored the Amazon region for much of its history, it seems clear that radical political actors, who may include Aidesep leader Pizango himself, have managed to twist the Aidesep protests to disturbing ends this time around.

MCKINLEY